

## University Students in the New Era

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*“Oh Lord! Gracious goodness! Here they are, here they are!” screams Lyuba with her face glued to the window.*

*Sure enough, there is Volodya sitting in the phaeton with St. Jérôme but no longer in his dark blue coat and grey cap but in the uniform of a University student with its blue-embroidered collar, three-cornered hat and short gilt sword at his side.*

*“Oh, if only she were alive!” cries grandmamma, seeing Volodya in his uniform, and falls into a swoon.*

—Leo Tolstoy, *Boyhood*

In a country that is being “modernized,” however poorly this painful process may be understood by all concerned, the university, and higher education generally, is in a central but deeply ambiguous position. On the one hand, institutions of higher education are necessary in molding and training the personnel necessary to run a modern state. On the other, the university is almost certain to produce a variety of criticism, ranging from the purely technical sort to the radical moralism of the intelligentsia point of view.

Student political activists are drawn naturally, if far from exclusively, to intelligentsia attitudes. Even upper-class students, who have a definite stake in the existing order, may not, at that early



stage of their lives, perceive their interests rationally, clearly, or selfishly. Nor are they likely to understand the duration, difficulty, and social cost of political change. As Donald K. Emmerson, a perceptive recent commentator, has written:

Righteous in tone, symbolic in content, student politics tend to differ from "adult" politics in the sense that it is more often the art of the impossible. This emphasis on style over program and commitment over compromise is at once the weakness of student movements and their strength. Student political leaders cannot always escape criticism for the irrelevance of their conceits, for dissipating their energies in proclaiming and protecting ideal images of self and society while ignoring the complex, mundane, "low-payoff" tasks of incremental reform. Yet in those very images—in the credibility of the myth of student innocence, in the purity of their rage against evil—lies the fragile chance to effect basic change, albeit not singly or directly but by triggering or accompanying larger forces into action.<sup>1</sup>

The student movement was of fundamental importance in Russian politics, from the late 1850s on—precisely the period in which the situation in the universities became of major and practical concern to the Russian government. Both Alexander I (in his late years) and Nicholas I had worried about subversive ideas in the universities. But under Alexander II, the old prophecy of Joseph de Maistre seemed to be taking on flesh: what Russia had to fear was not the specter of peasant insurrection, not Pugachëv, but "a Pugachëv of the university."

The Russian universities in the mid-nineteenth century were of comparatively recent origin. The oldest, in Moscow, had been founded only in 1755. Kharkov and Kazan' received universities in 1804, St. Petersburg in 1819, and Kiev only in 1834. (The two non-Russian universities of the Russian Empire, Dorpat and Vilna, are somewhat peripheral to our concern with social ferment in Russia, as is the University of Odessa, which came into existence only in 1865.)

The relationship between the Russian gentry and the universities had always been uncomfortable. In fact, until after 1825, the gentry never took to the educational institutions the state had



created, in large part for them. The student body in Moscow remained very small throughout the eighteenth century. (In 1764 there were only forty-eight students in residence, of whom eight were members of the gentry. At the end of the century, there were still no more than a hundred.<sup>2</sup>) Tutors and foreign universities were the rule for most gentry who cared about ideas and culture; those who cared less, but wanted a service career, often attended military academies, which gave them a high rank upon graduation. Despite the fact that the university was heavily plebeian in social composition (its students being largely the sons of lower officers, priests, free peasants, and even serfs), it failed to democratize the ruling elite because of its small size.

Under Alexander I and Nicholas, the situation grew more complex. Alexander was determined to reconcile the gentry to the universities, three of which were founded under his reforming auspices, and Nicholas showed signs of wanting to restrict university education to them, despite his fears of a gentry *Fronde*. Alexander's reforming minister, Mikhail Speransky, changed the situation with his Education Act, which became law in August 1809. This decree made the achievement of the eighth rank in the service hierarchy (which conferred nobility) dependent upon a certificate from a university "testifying to the successful study of sciences appropriate to his branch of civil service." If the candidate could not produce such a certificate, he had to go to the university and pass an examination to the same effect. The Education Act thus went some distance toward restoring "the Petrine bond between education and state service."<sup>3</sup> Despite this blow to aristocratic dilettantism, however, it was not until after 1825 that the thinking members of the gentry, at any rate, really embraced the university. With the increasing mistrust between the monarchy and the more cultivated and speculative members of *obshchestvo* (particularly those who approached an intelligentsia mentality), the university became the refuge of the latter and thereby took on a respectability and prestige it had never before enjoyed in gentry circles—as evinced, for instance, in the quotation from Leo Tolstoy's memoirs that heads this chapter.

Despite Nicholas's distrust of the gentry, an attitude that was



permanently exacerbated by the Decembrist Revolt, he was even less inclined to the idea of raising up substantial numbers of the lower classes through the educational process. Although in theory the universities were open to all the free estates of the realm (in 1827 serfs had been forbidden by statute to attend), the talented plebeians who had previously used the university to advance their fortunes now found new obstacles placed in their path. Secret ministerial directives sharply qualified open admission to the university in practice. The gentry-dominated gymnasias, with their classicized curriculum, became, if not the only means of entrance, by far the easiest way into the university, not least because they were in part given over to direct preparation of the student for university entrance examinations. Tuition fees had been introduced in the last years of Alexander I. In 1845, they were raised, not so much out of financial need as for reasons of social control.

Nicholas also divested the universities of a great deal of their internal autonomy. All educational levels came under direct bureaucratic supervision and control; the universities were placed under the administrative authority of the curators of the educational districts in which they were located. The governance rights of the university councils were sharply curtailed, and the curator might dismiss "unreliable" professors. A substantial number of inspectors, often of military background, kept tabs on the intellectual, political, and moral situation in both schools and universities, including student church attendance and reception of the sacraments.<sup>4</sup> The total number of gymnasium and university students remained small, and the rate of growth modest. By 1848, university enrollment had reached only 4,566, and gymnasium enrollment 18,911.<sup>5</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the upheavals of that year, the number of university students dropped by one fourth.

The year 1848 had other negative consequences. The University of Moscow was the only Russian university that had begun to develop the kind of tradition and *esprit de corps* so characteristic of the ancient universities of Western Europe. And although the center of the Slavophile-Westerner confrontation had been



the Moscow salons, the university had been a forum, too. But in the fear and then torpor that prevailed in intellectual circles after 1848, the university lost much of this intellectual vitality. Philosophy, under perennial suspicion in the nineteenth-century Russian university, disappeared again from the curriculum, as did the public law of the states of Western Europe. The remaining rights of the university councils were further curtailed; rectors and deans were no longer elected but were made agents of the Ministry of Education, and their functions were conceived by the government as identical with those of the detested inspectors. As the reign of Nicholas drew to a close, both faculties and students were passive, demoralized, and opportunistic. Apathy and careerism seemed totally predominant.<sup>6</sup>

As in so many other areas of Russian life, the Crimean defeat quickly convinced the government that "improvements" were necessary: the quality of education had to be improved and the quantity of educated men increased. So the new era began quickly in the universities, and a stream of decrees and administrative changes were launched after 1855. The universities were opened up to all those who could pass the qualifying examinations, and a dramatic increase in enrollment resulted. Between 1854 and 1859, the population of the universities increased by more than half. St. Petersburg almost tripled in size. Formerly proscribed subjects were reintroduced. Travel restrictions and the ban on the importation of scholarly materials were relaxed. Many of the military bully boys who had occupied the crucial posts of curators and inspectors were replaced by milder men with civilian backgrounds, and even more important was a general relaxation of "supervision." After 1858, student inspectors were relieved of their supervisory responsibilities except within the walls of the university.

The response of the rapidly growing student body to these changes—and to the feeling of liberal drift that accompanied them—was rapid and pronounced. Students seem to be particularly sensitive to the inner strength and self-confidence of the authorities whom they "confront." So it is no wonder more and more Russian students sensed that neither Alexander nor his



subordinates had a clear sense of what they wanted to achieve, beyond the broadest possible commitment to "improvement." Indecision at the top translated itself down the chain of command. Curators, inspectors, rectors, and the older professors lost their sense of the situation and some of their self-confidence. And the students were not slow to take advantage of this development. Beards, mustaches, and long hair—formerly strictly forbidden—made their appearance, then as now symbols of liberation.

The situation in which the students found themselves fostered the dramatization of certain adolescent behavior patterns—specifically what Jean Piaget has called the "constant mixture of devotion to humanity and acute egocentricity." The adolescent, writes Piaget,

thanks to his budding personality, sees himself as equal to his elders, yet different from them, different because of the new life stirring within him. He wants to surpass and astound them by transforming the world. That is why the adolescent's systems or life plans are at the same time filled with generous sentiments and altruistic or mystically fervent projects and with disquieting megalomania and conscious egocentricity. . . . The adolescent in all modesty attributes to himself an essential role in the salvation of humanity and organizes his life accordingly.<sup>7</sup>

If a propensity for messianic elitism is characteristic of able young people, a number of factors in the Russian situation contributed to its luxuriant development. One was that there were so few students—still fewer than five thousand in 1860–61. Then there was the importance the new Tsar clearly ascribed to the university and its personnel. To be a student was to be in the vanguard of progress, to be the hope of the nation; to the students from lower-class backgrounds, there was the additional feeling that they were joining this new elite, rather than merely assuming their natural place within it. And around them they perceived an inchoate or articulated sympathy; *obshchestvo* wanted to "believe in youth," especially in university youth, especially at the dawn of the new era.

No other social forces could contest the students for their self-



assumed role as the nation's hope. The government had been disastrously defeated in war, and Nicholas was dead. A substantial modern middle class was still decades away; the Great Reforms had yet to do their work. And the students were geographically concentrated; their developing *esprit de corps* could easily assume tangible and organized forms.

Until very recently, it has been customary to rely heavily on social factors to explain the growing radicalism of Russian students in the latter 1850s and 1860s. Alexander's measures to democratize the universities, so the argument runs, brought plebeian elements into *obshchestvo* (or at least into its vicinity), resulting in quite substantial changes in the quality and texture of Russian culture within a surprisingly brief period. These people—the children of priests, doctors and medical functionaries, marginal landowners, and lower bureaucrats—received the now-famous label of *raznochintsy* (literally, “the people of various ranks”), those who could not or did not fit into Russia's disintegrating caste system. Soviet historians, analyzing the alleged replacement of “feudalism” by “capitalism” on the historical stage, often periodize the history of the intelligentsia similarly, indicating that at some point around 1861 the gentry ceased to be the dominant social element in the intelligentsia and were replaced by the *raznochintsy*. Many Western historians have endorsed this general view, without claiming a comparable sociological precision: “From Gentry to *Raznochintsy*” or some similar phrase indicates that Chernyshevsky is about to be introduced in textbook or lecture.

That much of the intellectual leadership in Russian radicalism in the 1850s and 1860s was in the hands of *raznochintsy* cannot be denied. In such an aristocratic culture as Russia was, the appearance of so many sons of priests on the social and intellectual scene could not fail to make a deep impression, and it is perhaps not surprising that historians often characterize the entire period as *raznochintsy*. To the most obvious names of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov one could add a score of others. Certain of the seminarians pioneered a militant and uncompromising style and image that proved deeply attractive to several generations of



Russian radicals. With the broadening of the social base of the universities, upper-class students came to be more immediately aware of the poverty of their lower-class confreres, and in the atmosphere of the period diluted their snobbery with a volatile mixture of compassion and admiration. This opening up of the university, despite periodic attempts by the government to limit or even reverse the policy, proved irresistible, and it undoubtedly hastened the demise of the educated gentry's virtual monopoly over Russian intellectual life.

Still, despite the leadership provided by Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky and the prominence of seminarians at both the *Contemporary* and the *Russian Word*, there is little evidence to suggest that *raznochintsy* students as a group were decisive in the growth of student dissatisfaction and radicalism.<sup>8</sup> Nor does the figure of Chernyshevsky seem to have been more attractive to the sons of priests or poor army doctors than to the children of gentry landowners. Indeed, the reverse may be true. To an upper-class student, tormented about his privileged position and exploitative social role, and determined to repudiate them, the persona of Chernyshevsky could have a special appeal—based on militant moralism and cultural strangeness. Despite the appearance of a number of *raznochintsy* in prominent positions, the evidence suggests that most lower-class students were simply trying to “make it” in the upper world of Russian society, whose doors were now at least ajar.

The two great Russian novels about the radical politics of the 1860s, Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* and Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, suggest opposite answers to the question: Were the young radicals of the 1860s rebelling *against* the values of their “parents” (the gentry liberals of the 1840s) or simply acting out those values in a more vigorous, extreme, and uncompromising fashion? Turgenev stressed rebelliousness, and his version of the generation gap has been more generally accepted. It is certainly true that in any period of impending social change or upheaval, generational conflicts are exacerbated, which is one reason why Turgenev's vivid portrayal of those differences has always seemed so compelling.



But it might be argued that Dostoevsky's view of the situation was more profound, however idiosyncratic his demonic portrayal of 1860s radicalism. Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky, the 1840s Westerner (and a caricature of Granovsky), is the father of Pëtr Verkhovensky, the radical of the 1860s. Their values are ultimately identical; the younger Verkhovensky is merely more thoroughgoing and consistent, less timid and sentimental. What Dostoevsky saw less clearly is that the Slavophile ideas that affected him so powerfully had themselves contributed to the satanic social doctrines against which he fought so hard.

The fact is that we do not know enough about the backgrounds of individual radicals to generalize as to whether they were rebelling against the personal values of their families or putting those values into practice in a more consequent and militant fashion, a question that has often been raised with respect to more recent "young radicals."<sup>9</sup> A comparison of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov suggests the difficulties of the question. Up to a point, the backgrounds of the two were remarkably similar. They were both the sons of priests, both had demonstrated piety and intellectual precocity as children, and both were from provincial backwaters. But Chernyshevsky's biography suggests a substantial carryover in basic values from childhood to maturity, from the bright, ascetic, repressed child of the provinces to the radical of St. Petersburg.<sup>10</sup> One has the sense that Chernyshevsky's rejected Christianity gave him the emotional basis for his radicalism and guided him in his first intellectual formulation of moral principle. Nor does Chernyshevsky seem to have regarded his intellectual break with the values of Russian society as a repudiation of his parents. "More and more," Chernyshevsky wrote in his diary at the age of twenty, "I recognize a similarity between [my father] and me in the best moments of my life, or, in any case, between him and what I consider to be the best in man."<sup>11</sup>

Dobroliubov's case was very different. If Chernyshevsky's childhood was idyllic, Dobroliubov's was grim. Dobroliubov's father, far from being generally respected, beloved, and permis-



sive, seems to have been an irritable tyrant with a penchant for bootlicking. Chernyshevsky was sent by his family to the University of St. Petersburg, but Dobroliubov broke with his father when he left the seminary for an intellectual career in the capital. The stages in Chernyshevsky's biography flow into each other, while Dobroliubov's brief career speaks of tremendous repression,<sup>12</sup> followed by a frenzy of revolt and permanent instability.

An unquestionable precondition of the growing student radicalism of the late 1850s was the mood of "liberal" reformism unleashed by Alexander II's educational reforms and most of all by the coming of Emancipation. In general, this link between student attitudes and broader and more diffuse social moods seems characteristic. A determined radical minority can pursue its activities for some time without broad social sympathy, but a large-scale student movement depends on its participants feeling that they have substantial—if halting or inarticulate—support outside the walls. When the social mood changes drastically, as Americans have recently had occasion to observe, student attitudes are likely to alter correspondingly. Perhaps it is best of all to be able to feel that you are doing the right thing, that most people know you are, and that they admire you and wish you well, although they are too timid or socially encumbered to join you, despite the belief, shared by all thoughtful parties, that the future is on your side. For a time in the late 1850s, Russian students—or at least an activist minority—were in that happy position.

Student movements also need non-student figures with whom they can identify—members of the faculty or other individuals within the university, or figures from the larger world of journalism or politics. Russian students, in fact, had both. There were the remote but glamorous figures of Herzen and Ogarëv in London, and the increasingly influential group around the *Contemporary*—above all, Chernyshevsky. Nearer at hand were sympathetic and popular "liberal" professors, like Konstantin



Dmitrievich Kavelin, professor of law at the University of St. Petersburg. L. F. Panteleev, whose memoirs illuminate the period vividly, recalled Kavelin in the following striking terms:

He tried to become close friends with his students; all those of any talent could count on being received at Kavelin's Sunday morning receptions, which were specially arranged for students. He always expressed his opinion without the least hesitation, without nervous or sidelong glances—whether it was agreeable or not—while at the same time he knew how to listen attentively to any objection, without ever attempting to intimidate a young opponent with his authority. At the receptions, scholarly questions were discussed, as well as the latest in literature, but primarily the phenomena of our contemporary domestic politics. Principally, of course, this meant the liberation of the peasants. Being very well informed as to the course of the reform, K.D. informed us of its most trifling details and the difficulties which it was encountering. . . . It was first from K.D. that we learned of the initial preparations of N. A. Miliutin for the creation of the zemstvo institutions,\* and it was also K.D. who explained to us the full significance of the transformation which was being prepared, not only from the economic point of view, but the social. . . . Through his broad contacts, K.D. was *au courant* with everything which then had social significance, and he gladly shared it all with his interlocutors. There was only one boundary which K.D. never crossed: even I, a student enjoying his particular favor (when he left for the country in the summer, he entrusted me with arranging the juridical chronicle in [the journal] *The Century*, one of whose editors he was)—even I never saw *The Bell* at his place, although he undoubtedly received it. He did, however, often tell us interesting things from it.<sup>13</sup>

Kavelin was probably the most influential of the activist, reform-minded professors of the late 1850s, but at the climax of student unrest and disorders in 1861–62 he ran into trouble. His was the basic dilemma of all moderate progressives in periods of acute disorder. He did not provide the kind of uncompromising support the most militant students demanded, while the more moderate and conservative authorities held him responsible for the breakdown of order. Kavelin always prided himself on being able to communicate with people of radically different persuasions:

\*The zemstvos were organs of local government that were introduced after the Emancipation.



the Slavophiles, conservative bureaucrats, Herzen, Dobroliubov. In that respect he belonged to the 1840s, not the 1860s. And when the political situation polarized beyond a certain point, he ended by being acceptable to no one.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between what one might call "campus issues" and the dramatic development of reform at the national level was complex. Undoubtedly, most student activists focused on local rather than national concerns, although the excitement of the Emancipation drama had a catalytic effect. What people seem to have noticed first was that students seemed to be thinking and feeling more as a group, that class and regional differences seemed to be diminishing, and that the students who arrived at the universities in 1858 seemed to be distinctly more interested in politics than their predecessors had been.

Soon the greater cohesion of the students began to create "we-they" situations. Since the attitude of the university authorities—the curators and rectors—was now uncertain or even sympathetic, student organizations began to spring up: libraries, scholarship funds (financed by the richer students for their poorer colleagues), social clubs, and a spectrum of periodicals—ranging from quite acceptable scholarly journals to badly printed imitations of the *Bell*. As student corporatism developed, clashes with the police began to be more serious, if not actually more frequent. In the old days, these clashes seldom had had serious consequences. Increasingly, after 1856, students viewed the beating or maltreatment of one of them as an offense against the entire body, and they met, often in large numbers, to seek redress. Sometimes they succeeded, particularly at first, as neither the university nor the civil authorities were accustomed to dealing with crowds of determined students. Under Nicholas the educational bureaucracy would automatically have had recourse to Draconian measures. Now its officials hesitated—either because they simply had lost their bearings, or because the signals they received from above were confusing, or because elements among them were touched with the sympathy toward reform, so common to *obshchestvo* in general. As Anthony Graham Netting, a perceptive student of Russian public opinion, wrote a few



years ago, "political and cultural revolutions depend less on their dedicated partisans than on the apparent enemies who in crucial moments partly give way. It was this involuntary reserve army that liberal *obshchestvo* [had assembled] under the very guns of Nicholas I."<sup>15</sup>

Sometimes the animus of the students was directed at university officials, particularly the prying and officious student inspectors. After a rather nasty case at Kazan' in 1857, which began with a parietal violation, a number of students were expelled, but the inspector resigned and so, eventually, did the curator.<sup>16</sup> A rather similar case occurred at Kharkov in the same year, when one of the curator's minions struck a student in the course of "arresting" him for appearing on the street in an improper uniform. A series of tumultuous student meetings ensued, in the course of which the curator felt himself forced to resign. Both of these incidents, and others like them, were regarded by the students as victories and whetted their appetites for more.

Incompetent, indifferent, or authoritarian professors (some were all three), who were regarded as holdovers from the bad old days of Nicholas, were frequent targets. To achieve their removal was not merely educationally desirable but took on a political coloring as well: it was part of the task of reforming Russia. Students answered back to these professors in class, petitioned against them, boycotted their lectures, or resorted to systematic harassment (clapping, whistling, and so on). These incidents, too, were likely to escalate, and the administration frequently found itself in the middle, between an outraged and defensive faculty majority and an aroused student body. In the spring of 1859, Prince Viazemsky, the son of the great poet who was Pushkin's friend, became curator of the educational district of Kazan'. He replaced a man who had been driven out by just such an episode—an attack on a professor, which had led to a series of boycotts, expulsions, and general chaos.

For better than two years, Viazemsky managed to keep matters under control. He was cognizant of the relationship between "student unrest" and social reforms being carried out elsewhere, and he did his best to be reasonable, accessible, and not to over-



react and make things worse. Conservative officials tended to feel that he was not reacting at all.

But even an intelligent and tactful conservative like Viazemsky was not immune from the pressures of the day. The Kazan' students had tangled with an Italian professor of geography in 1859; although he was an eminent scholar, his Russian was so bad no one could understand his lectures. In the tumultuous fall of 1861, the students began to work on him again. This time, Viazemsky and his hitherto tactful and discreet inspector let the matter get completely out of hand. The university was closed for several months in the late fall and winter, and the buildings were briefly occupied by troops. Several scores of students were expelled, and after two separate investigations, one of them involving an elaborate government commission, Viazemsky was replaced in June 1862.

The principal means of mobilizing student support in one of the frequent *istorii* ("histories") was the so-called *skhodka*. The term was of peasant origin, significantly; it meant the meeting of the village assembly and was taken over by the students to designate their own meetings. As the 1850s wore on, *skhodki* became ever more common and often unruly. In most instances, they were unauthorized, although rules governing *skhodki* were at least hazy; in some instances (St. Petersburg), the curators and rectors had initially encouraged them, thinking to draw the students into orderly and practical cooperation in their own governance. But the *skhodki*, like other forms of student assemblies, came to be regarded by the authorities as dangerous in the extreme, and they were forbidden by law in May 1861, unless specifically authorized, as was "all bargaining with them through deputies or mobs."<sup>17</sup>

Although the primary focus of the students' discontent was on their own position in a university badly in need of reform, a few were getting more interested in radical solutions to national problems; after 1858, the loose congeries of ideas that would become known as Populism was more and more attractive to a minority of the students, although not necessarily to the most militant. Everyone had something to say about Herzen's *Bell*.



Newssheets and "journals," some printed and some handwritten, began to make their appearance in the universities during and after 1858. In St. Petersburg there was the *Herald of Free Opinion* (*Vestnik svobodnogo mneniia*) and the more radical *Little Bell* (*Kolokol'chik*). Venturi notes that in Moscow alone at least four manuscript newspapers were circulating in 1858: the *Spark*, the *Living Voice*, the *Echo*, the *Unmasker*.<sup>18</sup> Kharkov had its *Free Word*. Finally, at Kazan', St. Petersburg, and elsewhere, the corporate, student-run libraries became centers for the accumulation and distribution of the *Bell* and other illegal literature. Most of the students' own newspapers were largely oriented toward what was taking place on campus, but there was a distinct subcurrent of interest in national politics, and the hostility toward local figures spilled over into criticisms of the government and Alexander himself.

Toward 1860, on most university campuses, groups were forming who cared only about the national arena and who utilized campus issues primarily to radicalize the student body. Also at Moscow was the so-called Library of Kazan' Students, from whose ranks were drawn some of the most dedicated and extreme radicals of the 1860s, among them P. E. Argiropulo and P. G. Zaichnevsky,<sup>19</sup> the principal author of the extremist Jacobin manifesto *Young Russia*. The Library of Kazan' Students undertook a considerable venture in clandestine publishing, beginning in 1859; extensive selections from Herzen appeared, followed by Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* and Friedrich Karl Büchner's materialist tract *Force and Matter*. Only Zaichnevsky's arrest in 1861 prevented the publication of P. J. Proudhon's *What Is Property?*<sup>20</sup> The University of Kazan' gave rise to the so-called Kazan' Circle in 1860, whose membership included the radical ethnographer I. A. Khudiakov. The ultimate goal of the group was to induce a peasant insurrection; in the short run, the circle tried to keep the student body "aroused and alert to attempts to deprive it of its 'rights.'" <sup>21</sup> There was a "secret society" at the University of Kharkov that as early as 1856 was vaguely discussing extremely radical ideas: how to make a political revolution, the revolutionary potential of the



cossacks, and even the question of regicide. A decision was grandly taken to extirpate the imperial family, although no one actually did anything.<sup>22</sup>

What is the best way to get at the relationship between student discontent within the university, spilling over into national politics, and the larger question of the development of Russian radicalism? Was the radical literature, to which the students had access in the late 1850s, actually important in their development? An even harder question to answer: What was the nature of the radicalizing experience that many of the Russian students underwent in the five-year period following the death of Nicholas?

To the first question, Soviet scholarship has given a fairly simple and unequivocal answer: student discontent was an important part of the larger upheaval that brought about Emancipation in 1861 and inaugurated the "capitalist period" of Russian historical development. Like the ideas of Herzen and Chernyshevsky, student unrest was in the final analysis a "reflection" or "echo" of the so-called crisis of serf agriculture and the rising curve of peasant disorder.<sup>23</sup> But this "explanation" is quite inadequate. Perhaps the notion of "reflection" is never adequate to explain the relationship between ideas and an economic substructure. Still, it is true that peasant unrest helped generate the excitement of the late 1850s. The Kazan' Circle believed that a peasant insurrection was a distinct possibility, and the expectation of an "inevitable" peasant insurrection was a recurrent motif in radical thinking into the 1860s. Still, this belief was basically a fantasy of the disenchanted portion of the Russian elite, and it often was more a function of their own powerlessness than anything else. The largely self-generated excitement that animated *obshchestvo*, and the students in particular, had more to do with their own altered situation than with any frightening or challenging upheaval from below. The government and many of the landowners certainly worried, among other things, about a peasant uprising, but the students saw themselves bestowing a full humanity on the peasants; their attitude was generous and rather patronizing.

The significance of literature and ideas as radicalizing agents



has been much discussed, both by Soviet and particularly by Western historians. Certainly the cluster of ideas, feelings, beliefs, and prejudices that eventually became known as Populism has a genuine intellectual content, and as the 1860s went along, people spoke and wrote in this vocabulary. But one should not exaggerate the direct, unmediated role of books and ideas. The ground must be prepared and the times right. Büchner's *Force and Matter*, which seems to have shattered so many Russians' faith in revealed religion, now seems to educated readers, even to radicals, not only a cramped and pedestrian tract but a new form of metaphysics. Even in Russia its vogue was brief, if powerful. The books that "influence" us this year may fail to move us two years hence. Intellectuals, and students in particular, are notably susceptible to fashion or, to employ a more complimentary term, to "the intellectual currents of the day." To say this is not to deny the sincerity of the commitment of the radical minority, but merely to stress their vanguard role; the commitment of most students to the "intellectual currents of the day" was "broad, rather than deep," as Panteleev remarked of the influence of the *Contemporary*.<sup>24</sup>

Very rapid and at least superficially "extreme" shifts in political allegiance were common in the late 1850s. Many students who had never really had any political views at all became "radical" quite quickly. But this characteristic of the period, attested to both by contemporaries and historians, should not be exaggerated. The movement of some students to the left was gradual and rather hard fought. Such moderate, vaguely "liberal," and Westernizing journals as the *Russian Herald* (*Russkii vestnik*) and the *Annals of the Fatherland* also had student adherents. The *Annals*, in particular, appealed to students who retained a pronounced bureaucratic mentality, who wanted orderly reform from above, and who continued to dream of brilliant careers within the limits of *obshchestvo* Russia as it then seemed to be evolving.\* Such students, who were likely to regard Cherny-

\*Dmitry Pisarev was such a student in 1858. See A. M. Skabichevsky, *Literaturnye vospominaniia* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1928), pp. 107-17. Panteleev remained an adherent of Katkov's *Russian Herald* until the very end of the 1850s. See his *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1958), p. 145.



shevsky and Dobroliubov as rabble-rousers, were in a real sense not "typical" of the times, but they, too, applauded the Emancipation and, from time to time, looked into Herzen's *Bell*.

Nor is it anachronistic to discuss the matter of "image," so important in American politics today, not least in student and radical politics, in the Russian radicalism of the 1850s and 1860s. Men like P. N. Rybnikov and especially P. I. Iakushkin helped by their lives and examples to create the figure of a Populist-ethnographer, wandering among the people and becoming part of them. That this image is not an adequate rendering of these men does not matter to the student of the 1860s. What matters is to understand how an influential minority of their contemporaries regarded them.

Part of the declining appeal of Herzen to Russian youth and his replacement by Chernyshevsky has more to do with the two men's images than with the ideas they put forward. The "younger generation" of Russian radicals in the late 1850s and 1860s was powerfully attracted to Chernyshevsky's puritanism, asceticism, deliberate lack of charm, and social ease. His whole bearing was an affront to the existing order, and he conveyed the impression that he would not make the slightest social concession: to smile and murmur a few ceremonial words to put an interlocutor at his ease would be, somehow, to betray his whole position. Sincerity was everything. He insisted on being accepted exactly as he was. Herzen, on the other hand, was a "gentleman," even an aristocrat. He loved good food, good wine, and brilliant conversation. He was charming—or could be—and however much he might criticize the existing order, he was clearly a product of it and was bound to it by a myriad tangible and intangible ties—not least the substantial sum of money he arranged to have brought out of Russia when he emigrated. Chernyshevsky conveyed none of this sense of attachment to the old. Both he and Dobroliubov embodied the most militant rejection of the old and the determination to create something new.

Much of this collision of images emerged in an open letter to Herzen, which was written by a young radical in France in 1866. I quote it at length, not because it is fair or accurate—probably



very few of even the most extreme and embittered Russian radicals would have endorsed its rhetoric except in the heat of battle—but because it conveys so well the way in which Herzen's image, persona, and style, rather than his ideas, were being rejected.

I have long since ceased [wrote Alexander Serno-Solovëvich] to read, or at any rate to be interested in your sheet [the *Bell*]. Hackneyed, long familiar sounds; rhetorical phrases and appeals, ancient variations on an ancient theme; witticisms, sometimes fairly clever, but more often flat; commonplaces about "Land and Liberty"—all this has become too tedious, too boring, too repulsive. . . .

Yes, the young generation has understood you. Having understood you, it has turned away from you in disgust; and you still dream that you are its guide, that you are "a power and a force in the Russian state," that you are a leader and representative of youth. You our leader? Ha! Ha! Ha! The young generation has long outstripped you by a whole head in its understanding of facts and events. Failing to perceive that you have been left behind by events, you flap your enfeebled wings with all your might; and then, when you see that people are only laughing at you, you go off in a rage and reproach the younger generation with ingratitude to their teacher, to the founder of their school, the first high priest of Russian socialism! You are a poet, a painter, an artist, a storyteller—anything you please, but *not* a political leader and still less a political thinker, the founder of a school and a doctrine. . . .

So you were the complement of Chernyshevsky! You marched shoulder to shoulder with Chernyshevsky! Such an idea I never expected even from you, and I have studied you closely. . . . You the complement of Chernyshevsky! No, Mr. Herzen. It is too late now to take refuge behind Chernyshevsky. . . . Between you and Chernyshevsky there was not, and could not be, anything in common. You are two opposite elements which cannot exist side by side or near one another. You are the representatives of two hostile natures, which do not complement, but exterminate each other—so completely do you differ in everything, not only in your philosophy of life, but in your attitude toward yourself and to other people, not only in general questions but in the minutest details of your private life.

Conceit is your great misfortune, it completely blinds you. . . . Come down to earth; forget that you are a great man; remember that the medals with your effigy were struck not by a grateful posterity, but by yourself, out of your blood-stained wealth. Look more closely



at what is going on around you, and you will then perhaps understand that dry leaves and paper snakes interest nobody . . . that you, Mr. Herzen, are a dead man.<sup>25</sup>

Few, if any, students of the late 1850s and early 1860s consciously modeled themselves any longer on Herzen, while Chernyshevsky was personally fascinating to many. Leo Tolstoy thought that "a bilious, spiteful man is not normal," but increasing numbers of radical students did not agree. In an aristocratic society like that of Russia, smelling of bugs was an excellent way of proclaiming one's disaffection. Good manners and reasonableness not only bound one indirectly to the established order, they were among the essential guarantors of liberal impotence.

Many contemporaries and historians noticed the intellectual shallowness of the radicalism of students (and some older people) in the late 1850s. In one sense they were correct. Very few of the students had really mastered Büchner, Moleschott, Proudhon, or Fourier, and their radical impulses most often found expression in sloganizing. (The arguments of their opponents, one might add, were not ordinarily on a higher level.) But intellectual influences are a secondary consideration here. Most people do not become radicals because of the books they read—although they may appeal to books and draw sustenance from them. To understand the radicalizing experience that students underwent in the late 1850s, one must look instead to the sharp break with the past that occurred in 1855–56 and the *consciousness* it helped induce, a consciousness that men were not wholly impotent with respect to their environment, that things might be changed, ought to be changed—and were about to be changed. One must look to the special qualities of youth and adolescence, and to the privileged and isolated position of Russian university students. Various Western intellectual currents helped to provide a language for expressing these feelings of mission: German materialism; the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill; the socialism of Saint-Simon and Fourier. And many of the ideas and preoccupations that had animated both the Slavophiles and the Westerners in the 1840s were reappearing now as guiding motifs of the new radicalism,



although not in a form that was intelligible to the older generation.

Some students understood these ideas, made a deep commitment to them, and contributed in turn to their development. For others they remained satisfyingly shocking slogans that corresponded to the emotional needs of the moment and gave them an important but fleeting sense of themselves and their generation. Some students went on to a deeper involvement with radicalism and the revolutionary movement; for others, radicalism was merely their kind of wild oats. But those whose radicalism could survive the withdrawal of the inchoate, "liberal" support of the late 1850s were a minority.

The view that institutions of higher education became, from here on out, the nursery of Russian radicalism is a theme of recent Western scholarship on this period.<sup>26</sup> But which students were likely to be radicalized at the university? Behind this question of university radicalism lies the larger general question of secondary education in Russia. The seminaries, the gymnasias, and the military schools were all harsh in their discipline, primitive in their pedagogical methods, and notably lacking in creature comforts. Most memoir literature that tells about these schools in the time of Nicholas is bloodcurdling, even to the reader who has cut his teeth on *Tom Brown's Schooldays*.<sup>\*</sup> But until much more systematic study has been made of secondary education under Nicholas, no serious discussion will be possible.

In fact, no background discussion of causal factors and circumstances can take us very far in analyzing what went on in Russian universities in the late 1850s and early 1860s. What happened there had a rhythm of chronological development that was de-

<sup>\*</sup>In an admittedly impressionistic survey, Alain Besançon has taken note of the bitter memories that many Russian radicals had of their secondary education, and contrasted it with the warm nest from which most of them had emerged. More concretely, he stresses the Manichaeian attitudes that were nurtured in the gymnasium: the hatred of authority, the vague democratic tendency, the beginnings of a culture of student solidarity. The harsh conditions in these schools must also have contributed to the popularity of the small number of "liberal" or "modern" secondary-school teachers who managed to survive under Nicholas. Their concern for the students and/or their hostility to the prevalent scholastic teaching methods appears to have won them a sympathy that no intellectual radicalism could then have achieved. See *Education et société en Russie dans le second tiers du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris and The Hague, 1974), pp. 16-49.



terminated in part by national politics and in part by the logic of events within each university. These patterns were similar in a rough kind of way, but there were many local variants. The "student movement" at the University of St. Petersburg was the most tumultuous, in part because the excitements of national politics were greater in the capital than elsewhere, in part because there was greater support for student attitudes and activities, both within the university and in its immediate surroundings, in *obshchestvo*.

The situation at Kharkov was complicated by the many Polish students there—better organized than the Russian students, but rather suspicious, even separatist, in their attitudes. Their complex relationship sometimes reminds a contemporary American professor of the difficulties that black and white student radicals encountered in the late 1960s in working out a concerted campaign against that "common enemy," the university administration. In fact, Polish nationalism sometimes made the Russian and Ukrainian students more moderate in their actions and demands.

Another variant is provided by the University of Kazan', the most remote and, in a sense, isolated of the Russian universities. There the faculty was considerably less competent than at the other universities.\* Kazan' students, furthermore, had a tradition of rowdiness and indiscipline, so it is not surprising that many disorders at Kazan' developed around bitter encounters between professors and students over the intellectual qualifications and performance of the former.

Soviet historians generally employ the term "student movement" as if there had been some kind of coordinated leadership and formally agreed-upon program—as if the students' encounters with the authorities were an organized political movement.<sup>27</sup> But despite a good deal of interuniversity contact, the ferment and the disturbances developed autonomously. One crucial difference between the Russian student movement of the

\*An exception might be made for the discipline of chemistry, and of course the great mathematician Nikolai Lobachevsky had spent his life at Kazan' as professor and rector. But his brilliant work on non-Euclidean geometry was recognized in Russia (and Europe) only subsequently.



1850s and 1860s and the student radicalism in America a hundred years later has to do with the means of communication. Geographical mobility and in particular the electronic media gave American student politics of the 1960s a national and even supra-national unity that was far removed from anything possible in the nineteenth century. The spread of radical politics on American campuses was often abetted by the gnawing feeling of inferiority that many students began to feel if their campus had remained relatively tranquil, while nightly news programs showed building seizures at Stanford and Columbia and a bombing at Wisconsin. Russian students simply could not be anything like so aware of what their confreres elsewhere were up to.

But one should not treat each university as a separate and unrelated story: the drama was far too similar. The national excitement and the government's attitude were unifying factors; and students moving from one university to another did help push the movement along. Fundamentally, however, structural similarities, rather than "influence" of one institution upon another, made for similarities in their histories during this period.